

Duxbury Clipper

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The Benjamin Freeman House Circa 1796 Builder's Dream House

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

When current owners Beverly and Ed Murphy bought their stately farmhouse at 59 Standish Street nine years ago, they knew little about owning and maintaining a historical home. "We had always lived in newer construction," said Beverly Murphy, "but soon realized the treasure we had and we



felt more like curators than homeowners."

It's a sentiment shared by those who lived in the Benjamin Freeman House, circa 1796, and the main reason this property still boasts most of its original materials and craftsmanship. Esteemed past town historian, Dorothy Wentworth, considered the property "one of Duxbury's best preserved old houses."

She researched and inventoried a vast majority of the town's historical buildings and authored the historical society's publication, *Settlement and Growth of Duxbury 1628 - 1870*.

Today the Benjamin Freeman House sits on a well-manicured 1.2-acre lot. The structure still resembles an old photo passed down by generations of owners, although the surrounding land has changed significantly from the days when Benjamin Freeman, a well-known and prosperous housewright and part sawmill owner, built his dream house.

Originally the property encompassed a 40-acre tract that stretched east to Harden Hill Bay. Freeman built his oversized two-story farmhouse on the west end of the property, close to the Nook entrance and to the farm on the west bank of Eagles Nest Creek belonging to the grandfather of his wife, Hannah



The Benjamin Freeman House, circa 1796, at 59 Standish Street, is currently on the market for \$998,000 and one of Duxbury's finest examples of house preservation. Photos by Debora Babin Katz

Bradford. A cart path (today's Hornbeam Road) meandered down to the water alongside the house, and a large barn stood at the rear of the property, with rolling hills down to a scenic view of the bay.

Benjamin Freeman was born in 1745. His parents, Joseph and Tabitha (Tobey) Freeman lived in the Tinkertown-Island Creek area.

"Tobey Garden Street took its name from his mother's family, and the hill then called Tobey's garden," says Tony Kelso.

Benjamin Freeman, with his brother Edmond, started a sawmill on the Island Creek stream, an enterprise that would provide Benjamin with the lumber necessary for his main occupation of house building. He owned many wood lots in town and it is likely that the wood used to

build his Standish Street house was native to Duxbury and sawed from his own mill, then transported by a team of oxen.

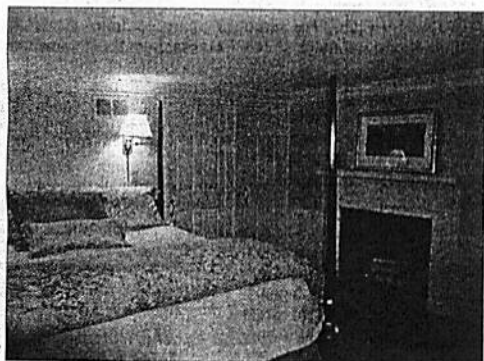
According to Wentworth, there is a story, passed down through oral history, of Benjamin Freeman driving a steer right into the house's kitchen in order to snake in a back log for the large fireplace. "The fireplace's size gives credence to the story," wrote Wentworth.

It is intriguing that Benjamin Freeman chose to build such a large home, with an enormous center chimney boasting two ovens, when his children were all but grown up. Hannah and Benjamin had raised their family at their previous property—then known as the Wormall Farm, a 20-acre property in the area of what is today Linden Lane—where they lived for 20 years.

They had four children; the first was stillborn seven months after their marriage, then came Bradford, born 1777, Eunice in 1779 and Nancy in 1781. (Prior to this, the couple lived in a house that Benjamin had built when he was 28 years old on Flake Hill, today known as the area of Long Point Lane. Here, he likely built another house for his business partner and friend Nathaniel Winsor, with whom he bought the two acres of Flake Hill land.)

In his Standish house, Freeman included signature moldings and panels above the fireplaces—each with its own unique style—and eight panel-pegged doors in the parlors. Throughout the house, he used thick, wide pine boards for his flooring. Today, these

continued on page 6



An oversized second floor bedroom, now the master bedroom with adjoining bathroom, maintains the original hearth and mantel, the original wide pine flooring and beautiful built-in window seats.

The Benjamin Freeman House Circa 1796

continued from page one



The exposed corner beam construction in this rear second floor bedroom adds to its nautical charm.

floors, rich in beauty and history, are in pristine condition. Their undersides still show the marks of the up and down saw motion used to craft them.

His floor plan, typical for its time, included two front parlors separated by a front foyer entrance with a beautiful yet simple pine staircase. A large keeping room to the rear is flanked by two smaller rooms. Today, one of these

smaller rooms serves as a guest space and bathroom, while the other is a modern day office. The keeping room, with its oversized fireplace (about 75 inches wide) includes its original crane for hanging kettles, which is unusually long at about 49 inches. The hearth is now a warm, inviting fixture in a formal living room.

What is most different about the Benjamin Freeman house from others of its period is the large proportioned rooms. Freeman clearly wanted to make a statement with his final property, which would serve as a retirement house for Hannah and himself. On the second floor, he designed two large front bedrooms and a sizeable rear room with a back stairwell that served as his wife's work room, complete with spinning wheel and loom.

"That room is an important feature of the old house," noted Wentworth.

Today, the upstairs still boasts the oversized bedrooms. One is now a master

bedroom with fireplace, built-in window seats and a master bath. An additional rear bedroom, bathroom and sitting room were carved out of Hannah's large work space by later owners who were careful to leave the corner beams exposed and original hardware and pine planks in place.

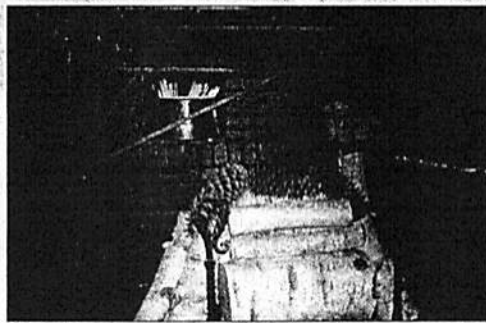
In 1802, Freeman's son Bradford married Waity Winsor and built a house next door to his parents' house at the site of 47 Standish Street (this house was torn down in



The front entryway is a wonderful example of this period's simple yet pleasant architecture with fine materials and workmanship.

the 1990s). The couple had a large family, nine children in all, who must have enjoyed many meals in their grandparents' large kitchen nearby.

Freeman's eldest daughter, Eunice, married Phineas Sprague in 1803 and went to live in Boston. She met with an unfortunate fate in 1817 while visiting in Duxbury. On a warm July day, she gave birth to a baby that died the same day; two days later



The original keeping room (kitchen) maintains an oversized hearth, approximately 75 inches wide, with two rear ovens, a wide brick hearth and an unusually long crane (about 49 inches).

Eunice died. A year after her death, Freeman sold a house he had built further down on his property, possibly meant for Eunice and her captain husband. On the site of today's Duxbury Pizza, this house was re-located in 1922 to land off Harden Hill.

The couple's youngest daughter, Nancy, never married. She stayed on in her parent's house to care for them. In 1838, Benjamin Freeman died at the age of 86 and Nancy inherited the house when her mother Hannah died four years later.

Nancy's niece, Hannah Winsor, lived most of her life with her aunt in her grandparents' house and continued to stay there after her husband, Captain Benjamin Winsor, was lost at sea in 1842. Nancy would later leave the house to Hannah, who in 1853 sold it out of the family for \$1,400.

Since that sale, some 18 owners have resided in this grand home and amazingly, much of the builder's dream house constructed in 1796 for his family and to illustrate his housewright abilities, is still

intact. As Dorothy Wentworth once remarked about this beautiful historic treasure, "Fine workmanship, fine woodwork, and good materials give a substantial atmosphere to the farmhouse."



The Benjamin Freeman House Circa: 1796

Rooms: 10

Baths: 2 half, 2 Full

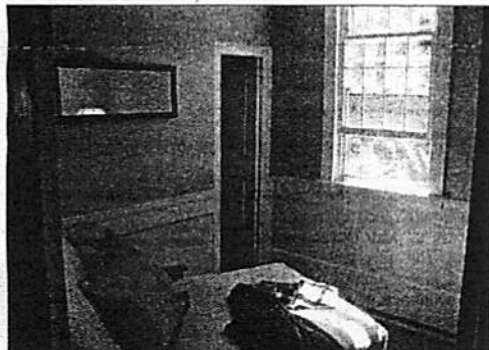
Fireplaces: 5

Lot Size: 1.21 acres

Historical Features: Wide pine floors throughout, eight paneled pine doors, original hardware, signature molding, oversized hearth with two beehive ovens and a large crane.

Offered at: \$998,000

Listing Broker: MaryBeth Davidson, William Ravels



The borning room with original wainscoting and slender paneled closet door is today a sunny guest space.